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ABSTRACT

In response to proposals in the strategic plan of the Virginia State Council of Higher Education to decentralize the agency's statutory responsibilities for academic program approval, this study examined how the 50 states and eight foreign countries currently review and approve such programs. Written policy materials were collected and analyzed and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the academic officers of the responsible state agencies to determine current practices, perceived strengths and weaknesses of current practices, and plans for changes. Five general models were identified: (1) independent institutional review; (2) interdependent institutional review; (3) state-mandated review; (4) quality assurance audit; and (5) modified institution/state collaboration. The models are compared in terms of their positions regarding state agency control. A separate review of the use of testing to determine program quality found that testing was not a normative practice in program review. Appendices summarize program approval and review practices in Virginia, the United States, and foreign countries. (Contains 88 references.) (DB)

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ED 427 586

Final Report

To the Planning Committee

Of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia

Academic Program Approval and Review Practices

In States and Selected Foreign Countries

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September 14, 1998

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Executive Summary

At the request of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), selected members of the Virginia Tech Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) faculty and several doctoral students studied the program approval and program review processes in the United States and eight selected foreign countries and regions.

This report outlines general and specific processes for both program approval and program review found in current practice. Models that depict these procedures are defined and the strengths and weakness of each are discussed. Where possible, the practices of specific states and countries are identified.

After a thorough review of policy documents and a series of structured interviews with the academic affairs officers in the various state agencies responsible for governing or coordinating their respective systems of higher education, three program approval and review models were defined. Believing that none of the three models in practice meet the needs of the Council with respect to the agency's newly adopted Strategic Plan for decentralizing these and other mandated activities, the consultants developed two additional evaluation models for the Council's consideration. The Quality Assurance Audit Model and the Modified Institution/State Collaborative Model will meet SCHEV's statutory responsibilities and the agency's strategic plans for decentralization of program approval and review procedures in a context of bona fide accountability. Both models are described in detail.

Supplemental documentation is contained in several appendices attached to this report. Policy documents from the 50 states and the countries studied have been forwarded to SCHEV staff.

Finally, the authors are aware of the Council's interest in testing (i.e., the use of scores on exit exams to help determine program quality) as it relates to the program review process. In this comprehensive review, testing was not found to be a normative practice. Testing is more commonly found in assessment activities that are not directly linked to program review.

Texas, Michigan, and North Carolina are experimenting with some testing variations within the context of program approval and review. On the other hand, there appears to be a trend away from the use of certain state sponsored placement tests such as in New Jersey and Florida. A brief review of state assessment and testing practices is provided.

Purpose of the Study

The Strategic Plan of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) recognizes an interest in decentralizing the agency's statutory responsibilities for academic program approval if it can be accomplished in an environment of accountability for program quality and need. Specifically, SCHEV set the following goal in its 1997 Strategic Plan:

ISSUE: RESTRUCTURING AND DECENTRALIZATION

GOAL 1: Decentralize responsibility for initiation of new academic degree programs to both the public and private colleges and universities by 1999.

The purpose of this study was to assess program approval and program review procedures currently in practice and to identify useful models for the Council's consideration in achieving this goal.

Methodology

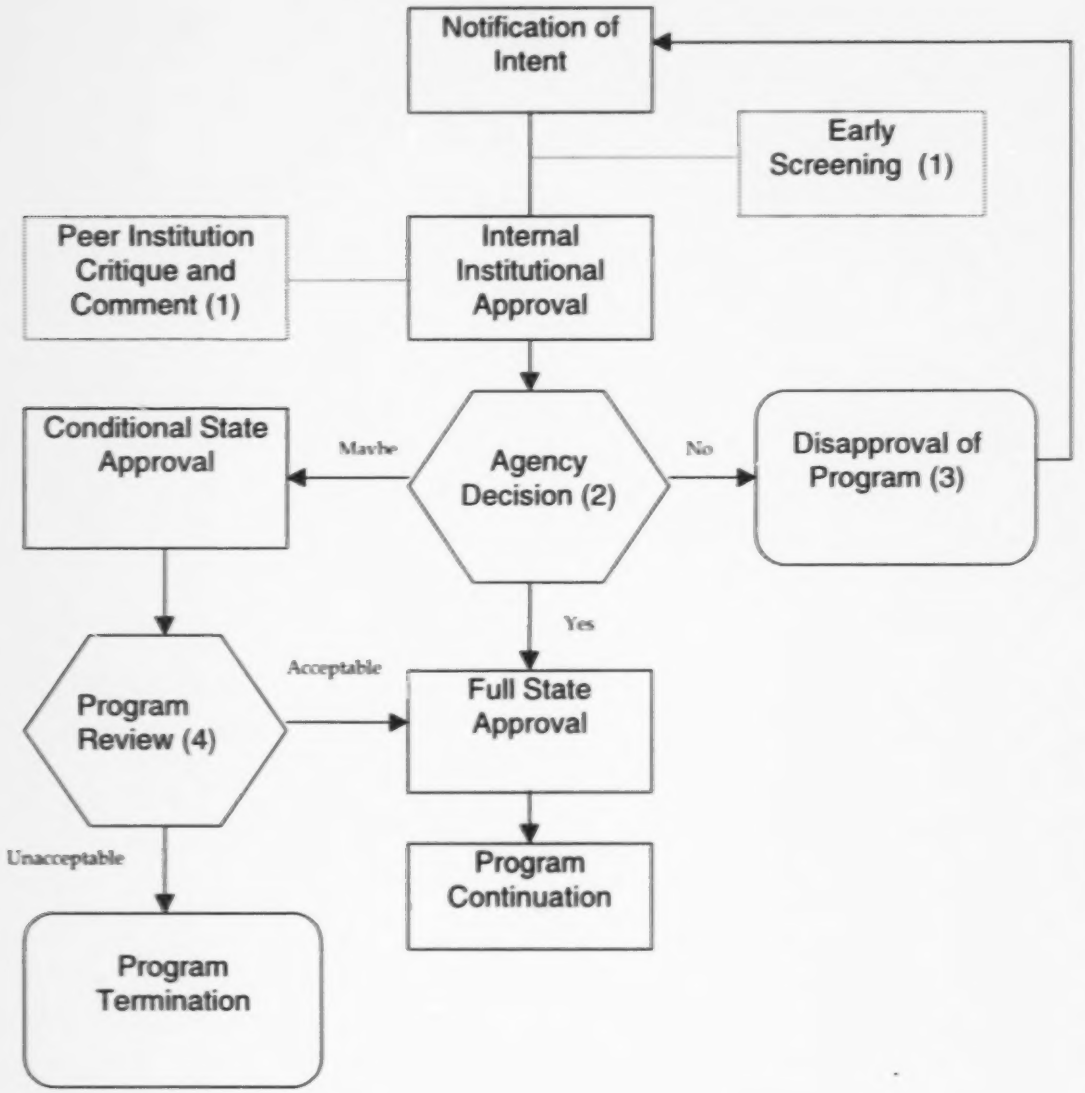
The Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) faculty and doctoral students undertook a study of 50 states and eight selected foreign countries and regions. Accessible written materials were collected and analyzed from the states and countries. Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with the academic officer of the responsible state agencies to determine current practices, perceived strengths and weaknesses of current academic program approval and review procedures, and future plans for change in these procedures. (Phone calls to 20 states also were made to assist SCHEV to collect certain information about the use of productivity standards in program reviews.)

Findings

Generalized Patterns of Program Approval

Practices regarding state agency program approval can be summarized and displayed in a generalized model. This model is depicted in Figure 1 and shows widely accepted practices at the institution and at the state agency level where multiple decisions and actions are possible. When proposals are disapproved at the state agency level, some agencies may help institutions improve their proposals and encourage them to resubmit. When proposals are approved at the state agency level, some agencies schedule a subsequent review as part of the approval process while others grant automatic continuation unless a review is triggered by productivity concerns.

State Agency Academic Program Approval Process Model



Notes:

1. Early screening is used by some states to save time and resources. Good proposals are helped. Poor proposals are discouraged.
2. The process used by state agencies may include internal review by staff, external reviewers, or peer reviews. Criteria include need, demand, duplication, cost, ability to deliver, etc.
3. Some states will aid institutions to revise their proposals even after a program has been disapproved.
4. Review at this stage comes as part of a conditional approval or as part of the criteria for full approval. It may involve rigorous review and include accreditation agencies, outside consultants, or agency staff.

Figure 1. State Agency Academic Program Approval Process Model

Steps in the Program Approval Process

Program approval by state agencies generally follows the steps outlined below:

1. Institution determines the feasibility of its intent to plan a new program

2. Institution notifies the state agency of intent

3. Institution prepares a draft proposal containing a brief statement identifying the program and addressing the following issues:

   - Relation to institutional mission, strategic plan, goals and objectives;
   - Projected source of resources (reallocation, external funds, request for new dollars);
   - Student need;
   - Relationship to other programs in the system and region.

4. The state agency distributes the proposal to other affected institutions to elicit comments and recommendations.

5. State agency staff comments and makes recommendations on the draft proposal.

6. Institution submits the full proposal addressing some or all of the following issues:

   - Centrality to institutional mission and planning
   - Need for the proposed program
     - Societal need
     - Occupational need
   - Student availability and demand (Enrollment level)
   - Reasonableness of program duplication, if any (not including general education programs)
   - Adequacy of curriculum design and related learning outcomes
   - Adequacy of resources to support the program
     - Adequacy of finances
     - Faculty resources
     - Library resources
     - Student affairs services
     - Physical facilities and instructional equipment
   - Adequacy of program administration
   - Adequacy of the plan for evaluation and assessment of the program
   - Diversity plan for increasing the number of students from underrepresented populations

- Accreditation (Is there a recognized accreditation agency for the program? Will accreditation be pursued?)
- Use of technology

7. The full proposal is reviewed by one or a combination of appropriate governance bodies, external consultants, and/or program review committees consisting of a representative(s) of the program proposing unit, state agency staff, and/or external experts in the area.

8. State agency takes action to:

   - Approve (provisional approval or full approval)
   - Disapprove
   - Defer

9. If provisionally approved, the institution will address the issues raised by the state agency. The state agency reviews the program after a relatively short period (e.g., for one year).

10. If fully approved, the institution will develop and implement the program.

11. If disapproved, the institution may have the right to appeal.

12. After the graduation of the first class of the new program, the program may receive an in-depth comprehensive review.

13. Change to current program status.

Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses of Program Approval Processes

Current practices exhibit some perceived strengths and weaknesses. These can be summarized as follows:

Strengths

- Tends to improve the quality of the academic program
- Increases interinstitutional communication and collaboration
- Incorporates future assessment criteria and accountability measures
- Ensures demand and need
- Reduces duplication
- Conserves resources
- Stresses application of state planning priorities

Weaknesses

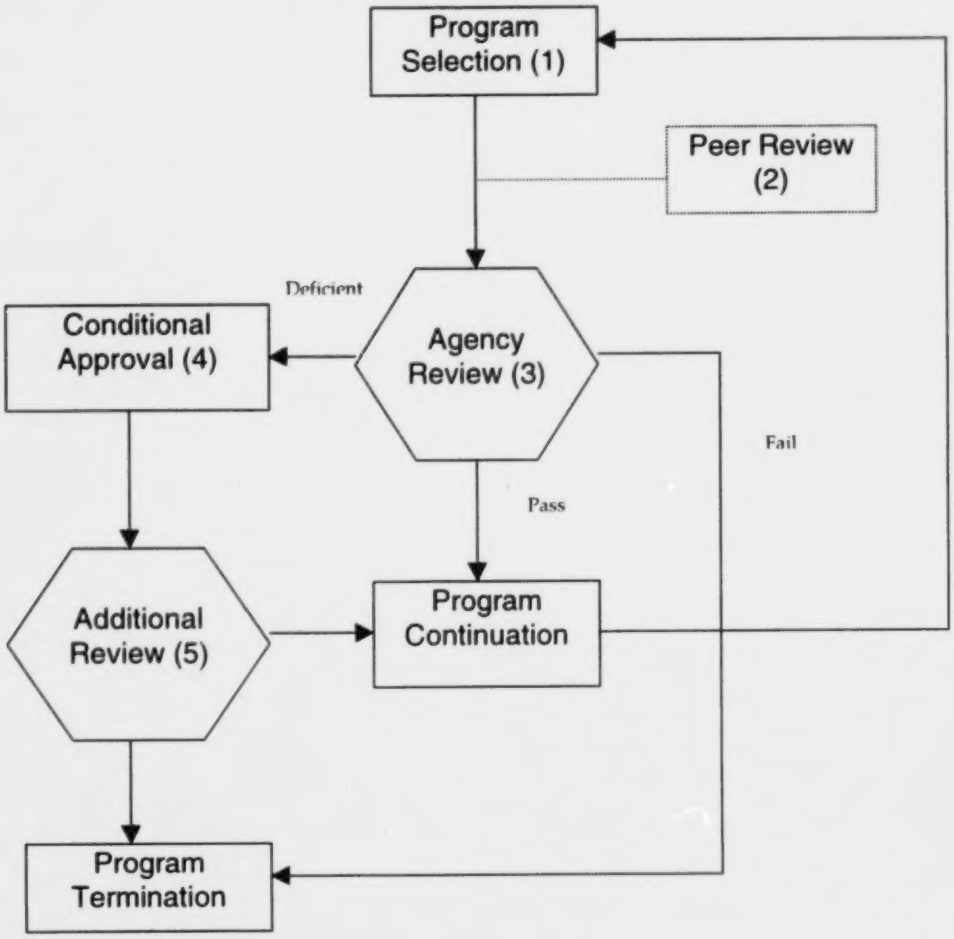
- Reduces autonomy of the institutions
- Can delay the initiation of needed academic programs
- Decision making may be politicized or arbitrary
- Staffing requirements may be excessive

Generalized Patterns of Program Review

Not all states conduct program reviews. Where they are conducted, as occurs in a majority of instances, they are conducted in differentiated or even idiosyncratic patterns. Though practiced in a variety of approaches, program review procedures in state agencies can be normatively represented in a conceptual scheme. This arrangement is depicted in Figure 2.

This conceptual scheme suggests three generalizations about academic program review processes. First, some external agent such as the state legislature or state agency selects programs for review. The review may be triggered by a concern such as productivity or mission-related matters. Second, institutions are requested to take certain actions such as conducting self-studies of program effectiveness. Third, state agencies take certain actions such as forming agency review committees or other structures which may include internal or external consultants and/or representatives from accrediting agencies to determine a program's approval status. Reviews, where conducted, often are focused on disciplines (or discipline clusters) or on broad categories such as degree level programs.

State Agency Academic Program Review Process Model



Notes:

1. Programs are selected for review on a cyclical or "triggered" basis. Cyclical patterns are based on varying recurring time frames. "Triggered" reviews occur due to response to results from productivity measures or interest on the part of the state legislature.
2. As programs are selected, some states use a peer review process as a precursor to the full review process. This process helps in the data collection phase.
3. Program reviews take a variety of forms. They may be done in conjunction with self-studies or accreditation visits. The institution, state agency, or external consultants may conduct them.
4. May be formal or informal. Programs that are approved conditionally are usually given a specific period of time to correct shortcomings. The programs are monitored and additional reviews may be conducted to determine the program's fate.
5. May lead to modification, consolidation, or elimination.

Figure 2. State Agency Academic Program Review Process Model

Given the analysis of the data, academic program reviews can be placed in one of three general approaches:

Independent Institutional Review. In this approach, the state agency delegates the authority to conduct program reviews to the institution. The state agency does not exercise any supervision or audit of the processes (e.g., Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, and New Jersey).

Interdependent Institutional Review. In this approach, the institution conducts the program review on a regular basis but does so under the guidance and audit of the state agency. The institution determines the review processes and criteria to be used consistent with the context and characteristics of the institution. The institution submits its program review report to the state agency according to an annual or cyclical state-determined plan. Program review reports conducted in this manner often include:

- Descriptive program information,
- Year of last program review,
- Documentation of continuing need,
- Assessment information related to expected student learning outcomes and the achievement of the program's objectives,
- Plans to improve the quality and productivity of the program, and
- Program productivity indicators.

Based on the information that the institution provides the state agency will make recommendations to modify, consolidate, or eliminate the program(s) (e.g., Hawaii, Kansas, and Montana).

State-Mandated Review. In this approach, the state agency determines the procedures and criteria of the program review, and conducts or commissions the review of the selected programs within the state system. The state agency staff will participate in the review process. System wide (lateral) program review of similar programs within the state may be carried out at the same time as can be seen in Illinois. The state agency also may conduct post-audit reviews of new programs following the graduation of the first class using pre-determined criteria (e.g., Georgia, Iowa, and North Dakota).

Variations on these program review approaches include the use of productivity reviews (normally triggered by evidence of below standard efficacy) and cyclical reviews. When productivity reviews are incorporated into the process, productivity indicators (such as credit hours, course enrollments, number of majors, number of degrees awarded, cost, and

related information) are examined annually as reported by the institution. The state agency identifies low productivity and/or duplicative programs and takes action based on their determinations (e.g., Virginia and New Hampshire). Sometimes when reviews are triggered in this manner, the state agency reviews all similar programs in the state (e.g., Montana). When cyclical reviews are conducted, all programs are examined on some pre-determined schedule such as once each 3, 5, 7, or 10 years (e.g., South Carolina and Illinois).

External consultants may be used as a complement with any of the generalized approaches to program review. External consultants form an advisory committee to participate directly in the program review process. On-site visitations may be performed. Most states require the use of external consultants. External consultants may be selected from several groups of experts:

1. External evaluators: Qualified professionals selected from in-state or out-of state to provide objectivity and expertise.

2. Representatives from peer institutions with similar programs: Selected from similar institutions with similar programs to permit informed exchange and to establish comparable standards (e.g., Georgia and Wisconsin).

3. Accreditation agencies: Representatives from specialized and regional accreditation recognized by the state agency may be used in the reviews (e.g., Montana and Georgia).

4. Representatives from state agencies of elementary and secondary education: Selected to achieve better linkage among the different educational levels.

5. Local lay people and other interested parties: Selected to address societal and occupational needs.

The consultants and/or representatives comment upon the quality of the program, resources available to the program, outcomes of the program, program costs, and other factors. An external review report is provided on the findings and each institution may have the opportunity to review the report and make comments. The final report and comments of the institution are reviewed by the state agency where further action may be taken.

The generalized academic program review approaches may occur in combination with one another and may be combined with the use of

external consultants. Some of these combinations may be described as follows:

- Example 1 features interdependent and state-mandated reviews with the use of external consultants (e.g., Arizona, Wisconsin, and Idaho).

- Example 2 features interdependent review and the use of consultants (e.g., Washington and Georgia).

- Example 3 features independent review and the use of external consultants (e.g., Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, and New Jersey).

- Example 4 features state-mandated review characterized by productivity review approaches or cyclical state-mandated reviews in combination with the use of external consultants (e.g., Virginia and West Virginia).

- Example 5 features independent review under state agency guidelines (e.g., New Hampshire).

Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses of Program Review Processes

Strengths and weaknesses of program review practices may vary according to the model or approach chosen; however, these perceived attributes generally may be characterized as follows:

Strengths

- Provides an on-going quality assurance check
- Even when done on an irregular basis, the process serves as an incentive to ensure quality at the institutional level
- When outside reviewers are used, a greater measure of objectivity can be obtained

Weaknesses

- Institutions may focus on the review process and do little with the results
- Reviews are not done with great enough frequency to provide real quality control
- Process is time consuming
- Process is expensive

Summary of Academic Program Approval and Review

Program approval and program review can be seen as integrated components of quality assurance within a state system of higher education. In this view, program approval is the initial and authorizing stage of program quality assurance and program review is a continuation and revalidation of the approval process.

The objectives of program approval and program review are the same: ensure mission compatibility, maintain academic standards, assure continuing improvement of academic programs, and guarantee accountability of academic programs. Issues in both program approval and program review also are the same: mission compatibility, need, program structure, availability of resources (financing, faculty and staff, facilities, technology, etc.), and quality assurances.

Program approval and program review processes can be both internal and external, that is, they can be carried out both within the institutions themselves and/or by external agents. External agents may include the state agency, external consultants, peer institutions, accreditation agencies, and other interested parties.

Internal program approval and program review can best safeguard the institution's autonomy, integrate the processes with the institutional self-improvement efforts, be more flexible, and boost the morale of the faculty and administrators of institutions. However, internal program approval tends not to provide sufficient stimulation and motivation for improvement. External program approval and review procedures are part of the internal program operating processes, exercise outside monitoring, challenge existing program development notions, ensure maximum objectivity and expertise, and encourage the exchange of good practices. However, external review approaches may interfere with institutional autonomy and bring extra financial and reporting burdens to the institutions.

Distinctions between program approval and review practices between undergraduate and graduate programs cannot be clearly drawn. Some states clearly are more concerned with one level of academic program than the other, but no systematic pattern in these concerns was evident from the data.

International Practices on Quality Assurance

Eight foreign countries and regions were included in this study: Australia, Canada, England, Germany (Lower Saxony), Hong Kong, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Scotland. In these international practices, program approval and program review often are intertwined and are called quality assurance.

Quality assurance approaches in international locations are similar to practices in the United States in many respects. Three general models are evident:

1. Self-regulating (regulation by the institution or provider of the educational program), as seen in Canada where universities have the authority and responsibility for quality assurance.

2. Externally regulated (regulation by an external agency), as seen in Australia. The federal government of Australia plays a direct and intrusive role in educational policy.

3. A combination of the two (mixed or collaborative regulation), as seen in most of the countries and regions, such as in England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Germany (Lower Saxony), and New Zealand, though the degree of the external control varies to a great extent. For example, in England and Scotland, quality assurance is more government-driven than in the Netherlands where the institutions are delegated more autonomy. This approach features institutional self-evaluation and cyclical review conducted by a quality assurance agency.

Distinctive Features of International Practices

- Institutional self-regulation (self-study) is combined with external quality assurance agency review or audit. The quality assurance agency ensures that the institutions implement their own quality assurance procedures effectively.

- The institution may either design its own quality assurance procedures or adopt a formal quality assurance policy determined by the quality assurance agency or by the government. Adopting the formal quality assurance policy helps to emphasize system priorities and ensures consistency and comprehensiveness of comments and judgement of external reviewers across the system.

- External reviewers (assessors) play a very important role to ensure objectivity and expertise, promote the exchange of good practices, and respond to the needs of the society. In some countries, external reviewers are draw from foreign countries (e.g., Hong Kong and the Netherlands), from industry (e.g., the Netherlands), and from the local lay people (e.g., Hong Kong). External reviewers may receive training from the quality assurance agency before visiting institutions under review (e.g., Scotland).

- In some countries, quality assurance initiatives are very extensive, including an assessment of institutional teaching and learning practices of all academic programs and an assessment of the research skills and training of junior academic staff (e.g., United Kingdom and Germany).

- Quality assurance results are scored (e.g., United Kingdom), ranked (e.g., the Netherlands) or published (e.g., United Kingdom) in some countries. Decision-making, such as funding and program elimination, is based on these scores or ranks.

- On-site visits involve meetings with groups of faculty, students, administrative staff, and those responsible for running support services. Time is spent in direct observation of teaching and learning.

- To reduce the administration burden, participants are encouraged to share proposals, databases, and trend analyses electronically (e.g., New Zealand).

State Testing Practices

This study did not investigate state agency sponsored testing programs for measuring student performance for either entrance or exit requirements. Instead, the study focused on academic program approval and program review practices as revealed in state publications and in interviews with selected state agency personnel. In this context, testing is not widely used and is not connected to program reviews.

Testing to measure student performance, especially in general education areas, is widely used in many states. In fact, student outcome assessment is a huge enterprise in this country. These practices do not yield universal satisfaction for policy makers, however. Frequently, tests of general education consequences do not measure what policy makers want them to measure and they are very expensive to implement and sustain. For many reasons, however, policy makers want evidence of achievement by students and increasingly they view the use of tests to gain the wanted evidence. However, evidence suggests a trend away from state developed placement tests such as New Jersey's Basic Skills Placement Test (NJCBSPT) and Florida's CLAST (see Erwin's report on "Assessment and Policy"). General achievement tests often produce disappointing evidence for policy-makers whereas more specifically tailored tests applied in a targeted fashion, such as to a major, are more likely to produce dependable and revealing evidence. The more tailored the testing practice the better the result but the more difficult is the overall task.

Most assessment programs are designed to facilitate curricular and teaching improvements, not to meet external accountability requirements. Still,

many institutions expect additional accountability requests to be made but they are uncertain about what forms the requests will take.

According to an April 1997 report prepared by the Council of the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC) and its Working Group on Student Outcomes from a Policy Perspective, policy issues that drive policy-makers to the use of assessment and testing practices include access, affordability, financial support, student preparation for postsecondary education, accountability, campus climate, facilities and equipment, faculty issues, productivity, technology, continuing education and life-long learning, public service/outreach, quality and educational effectiveness, quality of graduate and professional education, and workforce preparation. The report links student outcomes with policy issues and provides recommendations for further study by the group.

This report by NPEC also underscores certain policy-related issues in testing. Among the conceptual considerations that lead to implementation difficulties are relevance (How closely is the outcome related to an important policy issue?), utility (What is the potential of information on this outcome for guiding action to achieve policy objectives?), applicability (To what extent will information on this outcome meet the needs of multiple stakeholder/user groups?), interpretability (Will information on this outcome "communicate" with users?), credibility (How believable is information on this outcome likely to be for policy makers?), and fairness (Will the information bias or mislead in ways that may disadvantage one group of stakeholders or users vis-à-vis another?)

There is clear evidence of interest among state agencies in more testing to cope with evidence of less than satisfactory performance by students. For example, The Chronicle of Higher Education reported on September 17, 1998, that Massachusetts may require public college students to pass exit exams to graduate and that this initiative is ripe for adoption by other states where similar pressures are mounting for accountability in institutional performance.

While expectations for accountability likely will lead to more practices like the one being considered in Massachusetts, there is no indication from this study that such practices are now or will be in the near future directly and formally connected to state agency program review requirements. Whether they should be connected is a question open for further discussion .

Planning Assumptions (1998-2002)

As the consultant team moved from analyzing the information collected from state agencies and foreign countries toward making its recommendations, the following planning assumptions and propositions were developed to guide the process:

Higher education in Virginia will remain a cooperative confederacy, which

2. Legislated responsibilities of SCHEV will remain substantially unchanged except for the program approval process. If requested, the General

program approval process.

Resources to higher education in Virginia will remain substantially

4. Use of technology in higher education and especially distance education will accelerate, putting considerable pressure on institutions to develop

currently practiced.

The coupling of decentralization of selected functions and increased

for the Council.

The Council will retain authority to review and approve academic program

Propositions for Alternative Policy Decisions

These assumptions lead to the formulation of the following propositions that merit discussion within the context of this study.

_____: Academic program approval and review procedures generally are conducted to address program quality and program productivity at the

program costs and institutional productivity are the concerns at the state level.

Proposition 2
approval and review policies in a context of accountability is evident in agencies in other states though most state agencies involved in these processes

Proposition 3: Though interesting approaches to program approval and review

policies to tight state regulatory control, no model exists that can be adopted fully in Virginia without modifications.

Proposition 4: Alternative patterns to current state-level oversight of academic program evaluation can be accomplished within the constraints of existing fiscal resources that will achieve the major purposes of the statutory responsibilities of SCHEV.

Proposition 5: Three generalized models of overall program evaluation distilled from available information regarding current practices can be used to ground alternative policies for future practices:

- State Regulatory Model. A centralized model for quality control characterized by development and application of centralized regulatory requirements for program approval and review by state-level agency.
- Institution/State Collaboration Model. A consolidated model for institution and state agency cooperation characterized by jointly developed and administered program approval and review procedures by institution and state agency.
- Accreditation Model. A decentralized standards-based model characterized by the development and application of standards and guidelines for program approval and review and by cyclical audit by state and consulting agents from outside the institution.

Proposition 6: These generalized evaluation models can be classified on a continuum of state agency control. This classification is displayed in Figure 3.

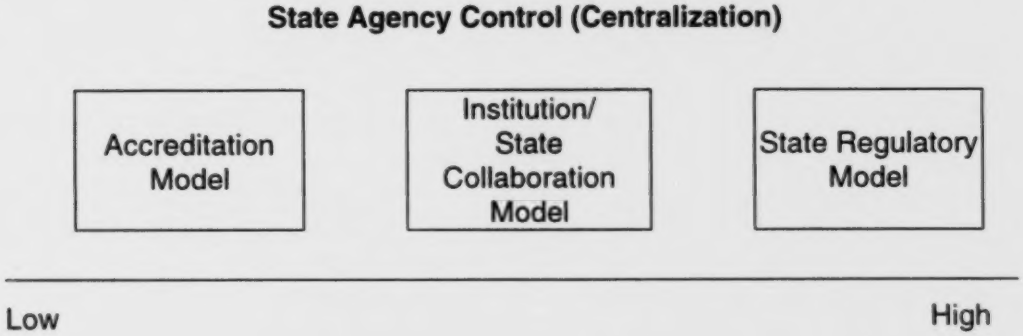


Figure 3. Relationship of Program Evaluation Models to State Agency Control

Proposition 7: Two alternative program evaluation models--the Quality Assurance Audit Model and the Modified Institution/State Collaborative Model--will meet SCHEV's statutory responsibilities and the agency's strategic plans for decentralization of program approval and review procedures in a context of bona fide accountability:

Quality Assurance Audit Model. A decentralized model of program

- governing boards,
- Development and application of institutional-level quality assurance policies and procedures (referring to policies and

and
- Cyclical or triggered state-level audit of these policies and procedures.

current practice by SCHEV since it does not involve the state agency directly in either program approval or review; however, it offers

decentralizing program approval and review functions.

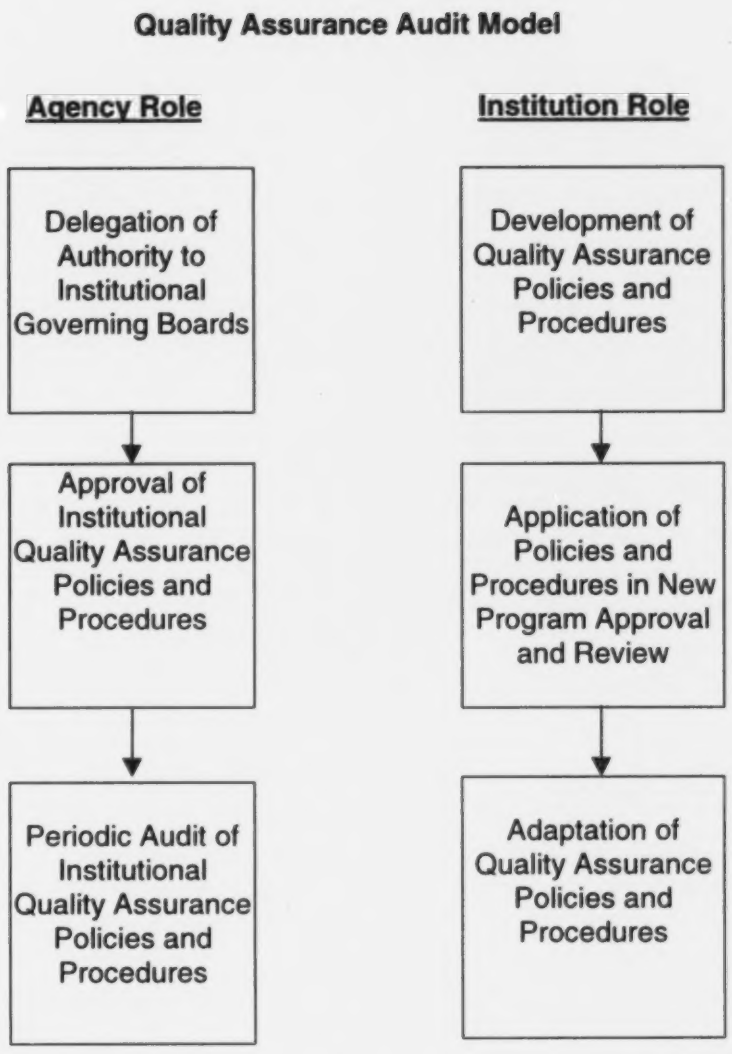

Quality Assurance Audit Model
Agency Role
Institution Role
Delegation of Authority to Institutional Governing Boards
Development of Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures
Approval of Institutional Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures
Application of Policies and Procedures in New Program Approval and Review
Periodic Audit of Institutional Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures
Adaptation of Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures

Figure 4. Quality Assurance Audit Model of Program Approval and Review

Modified Institution/State Collaboration Model
program approval and review characterized by:

- Shared institution and state-level oversight authority,
- Institutional-level program approval by classification according to mission relatedness (within mission, related to mission, outside of
- intervals) depending upon classification of initial approval.

This model is depicted in Figures 5 and 6 and represents the least

actual practice since many current activities would not be required. Further, it shifts greater autonomy to the institution when a new program

Modified Institution/State Collaboration Model

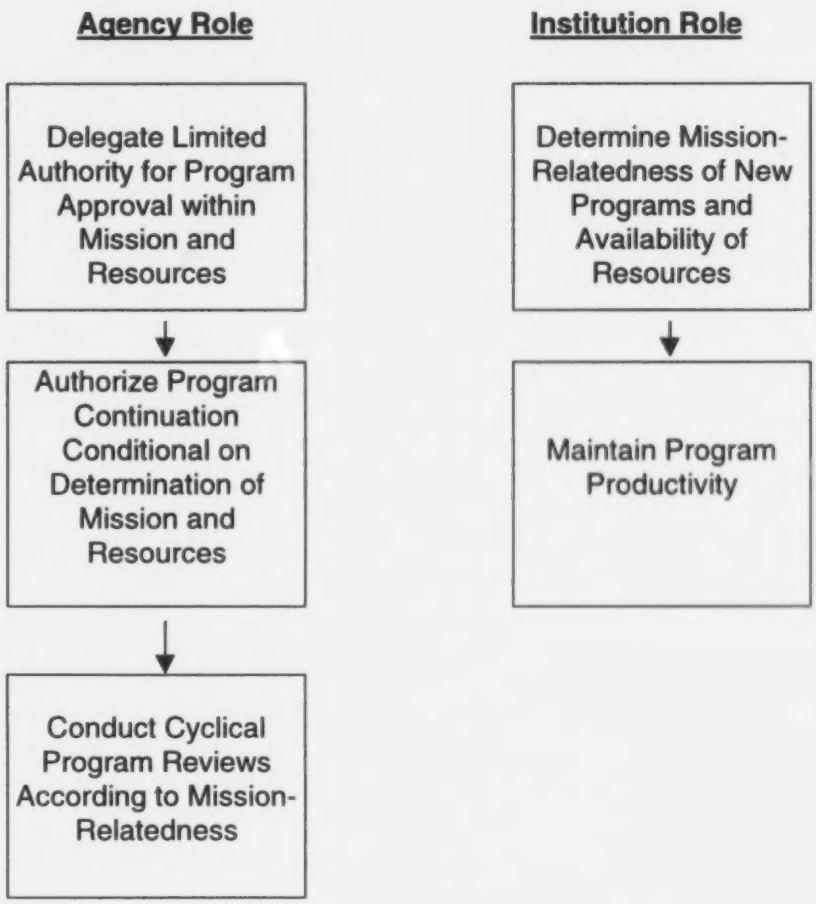

Agency Role
Institution Role
Delegate Limited Authority for Program Approval within Mission and Resources
Determine Mission-Relatedness of New Programs and Availability of Resources
Authorize Program Continuation Conditional on Determination of Mission and Resources
Maintain Program Productivity
Conduct Cyclical Program Reviews According to Mission-Relatedness

Figure 5. Modified Institution/State Collaboration Model

Figure 6. Program Approval and Review Status within the Modified Institution/State Collaboration Model

Both alternatives are attractive for different reasons. The Quality Assurance Audit Model places SCHEV in a policy/coordination role where the

would be integrally involved in process development and management but would leave the implementation of the process to its respective institutions. The

restructuring processes are excellent examples of this guidance/monitoring role.

The disadvantages of the Quality Assurance Audit Model may be that too

periodic system-wide audit of program offerings noting year-to-year changes might serve as an excellent way to monitor institutional activity. Self-study

additional information on institutional decision making in the area of program approval and review.

stratifies the approval and review process based on two critical factors--mission and cost. The model dictates that additional attention be given to programs that

require supplementary resources and fall outside an institution's current mission--the areas of greatest risk to the institution and the state. At the same time, however, institutions building new mission-related programs by reallocating existing resources receive additional control and authority. The disadvantage here is that risk-taking and innovation may be reduced if institutions act to avoid the more rigorous reviews that come with programs that may fall outside their current mission or require new resources.

Thus, the models observed in practice combined with the alternative models suggested by our research may be conceptualized by relative position regarding state agency control as shown in Figure 7:

Policy Alternatives

Within current statutory requirements, SCHEV could reframe its duties concerning academic program approval and review in several significant ways while sustaining or increasing institutional accountability. The agency must decide whether it desires to change its role in academic program approval and review. If so, the evidence from this study suggests at least two alternative courses of action:

1. Rewrite policy to delegate these responsibilities to the respective governing boards of the colleges and universities of the Commonwealth while maintaining authority for managing the process, or

2. Rewrite procedures to share academic program approval and review decisions with institutions by differentiating action needed based upon judgments of mission relatedness and resource requirements of new programs.

If the agency is not inclined to change its role, it may find some relief from current procedural obligations by rewriting its internal procedures to differentiate between the way it addresses academic program approval and review at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It also may find some relief in consolidating its involvement in several institutional reports such as strategic plans, restructuring, productivity measures, and student outcome assessment.

Relationship of State Agency Control in Program Evaluation Models

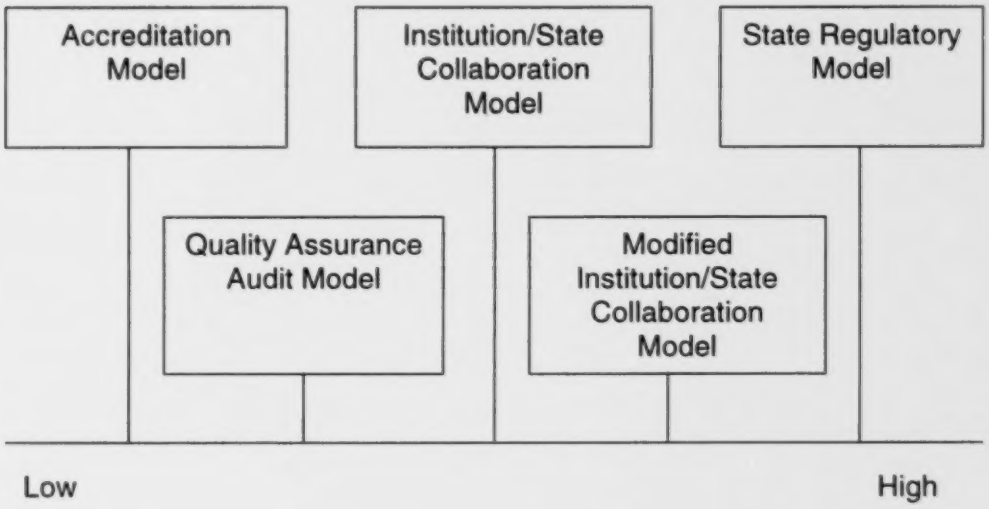


Figure 7. Level of State Agency Control in Five Program Evaluation Models

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Appendix A

A Summary of Program Approval and Review Practices in Virginia

State statute charges the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) with the responsibility "to review and approve or disapprove all new academic programs" (§ 23-9.6:1(5)). Virginia's uses a rather traditional approach to academic program approval.

Institutions wishing to submit proposals are required to give SCHEV advance notice (12 months minimum) of their intentions. A preliminary review is completed and other institutions are notified that specific proposals are being planned. This stage of the process is noted as "early screening" in the generalized model developed in this report. During this preliminary review, SCHEV staff assesses the proposal's potential for success given a variety of institutional criteria, such as mission congruence, funding plans, cost effectiveness, and delivery method.

If the proposal is judged to have merit, a full proposal is developed using a standardized proposal checklist and submitted for consideration. During this formal review a variety of criteria are considered such as student demand, employer demand, program duplication, and program alternatives. In reviewing requests for new programs, the Council staff attends to both the merits of the proposed program and the overall development of Virginia's higher education system. The Council may use external consultants, other state agencies, and other outside experts to help with this process. The SCHEV staff evaluates the proposal and makes a recommendation to the Council. The proposal is placed on the Council's agenda for action. If the Council does not act favorably on the proposal, the institution may appeal the decision.

Formal reviews of academic programs by discipline take place on an irregular basis as Council and General Assembly interests dictate. In its place, SCHEV performs an annual Program Productivity Review to limit degree-program creep. Since 1995, this review not only takes enrollment and the number of graduates into account but also includes other budgetary and program effectiveness considerations. When an academic program is identified as unproductive, a program may be placed on probation or terminated by Council action. Institutions may be allowed to correct, merge or voluntarily terminate unproductive programs.

Appendix B

Program Approval Practices in the United States

While program approval procedures are very similar, some differences do exist from state to state. These differences center around the need for preliminary approval to submit a proposal and a state agency's authority to approve programs, and can be categorized as follows: (a) those that require a pre-planning proposal; (b) those that only require institutions to submit full proposals, and; (c) those having no authority over program approval processes.

A. Program Approval Procedures Requiring A Pre-Planning Proposal:

As mentioned, some states require institutions to submit notification of their intent to submit a program proposal. This early screening is used by some states to save time and resources. These states include: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. The practices utilized within these states is outlined below:

1. Notification of Intent to Propose (NISP):

a. Prior to the program proposal date institutions are required to submit an NISP. This is a two page outline submitted to the state agency staff and the Chief Academic Officers (CAO's) of all other public higher education institutions in the state offering the same level degree as identified in the NISP. The time frame in which to submit this proposal can range from 0 months - 4 years. Information to be included in this document may include any variation of the following:

- a description of the program
- consistency with institutional mission
- financial considerations
- identification of available resources and additional resources that may be necessary for program implementation
- a statement about the uniqueness of the program
- justification of need (statewide)
- student demand
- capability of the institution to deliver
- implementation plan

b. Once the NISP is completed it will go through a review process conducted by the state agency, CAO's, and/or peer institutions that

all have an opportunity to offer comments. The proposing institution will have an opportunity to make changes based on the comments received and final approval to proceed is granted by the state agency.

2. Submit Full Proposal

If the NISP is approved, institutions are then required to submit a full, formal proposal to address some or all of the following issues:

- mission centrality
- student demand
- program need (institutional, statewide, job market)
- data needs
- costs
- enrollment
- delivery method
- curriculum
- description of available resources (faculty, financial, administrative, facilities)
- description of necessary resources
- funding sources
- assessment methods
- implementation date

3. Review of Proposal

Once a full proposal has been submitted it must then go thorough a review process. Proposal reviews may be conducted by one or all of the following which provide comments to the proposing institutions regarding any changes that need to be made or requests for additional information necessary:

- peer institutions
- external consultants
- state agency

The time frame for responding to proposals can range from 2 weeks - 10 months. In some cases failure to review and respond within the designated time period can result in automatic approval of a program.

4. Decision

State agency will deny the request, consult with the institution for additional information, or recommend for approval. Institutions may also

withdraw a request at any time.

B. Program Approval Procedures Requiring No Pre-Planning Process

In many states institutions are not required to obtain prior approval before beginning the planning process for new programs. In these instances a full proposal is generated at the institutional level and submitted to the state agency for review with no need for preliminary approval. States that fall within this category include: Alaska, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. Program approval procedures for these states include:

1. Submit Full Proposal

a. Institutions are required to submit a written proposal addressing some or all of the following criteria:

- mission centrality
- student demand
- program need (institutional, statewide, job market)
- data needs
- duplication
- costs
- enrollment
- number of credits required
- delivery method
- curriculum
- quality assurance
- description of available resources (faculty, financial, administrative, facilities, library)
- description of necessary resources
- funding sources
- assessment methods
- start date

2. Review of Proposal

Once a full proposal has been submitted it must then go through a review process. Proposal reviews may be conducted by one or all of the following who provide comments to the proposing institutions regarding any changes that need to be made or requests for additional information necessary:

- peer institutions
- external consultants
- state agency

3. Decision

State agency will deny the request, consult with the institution for additional information, or recommend for approval. Institutions may also withdraw a request at any time.

C. No authority over program approval process

Some state agencies had little or no authority over the program approval procedures for higher education institutions and appeared to serve in more of a planning or coordinating role. These agencies were not directly involved in program approval, leaving the responsibility for this task in the hands of the institutions themselves. States falling within this category include Minnesota and Delaware.

Appendix C

Program Review Practices in the United States

Program review occurs in differentiated patterns from state to state. As with program approval procedures, central themes can be identified and categorized as: (a) centralized review procedures; (b) decentralized review procedures; (d) limited or no review procedures in place, and; (e) states having no authority to conduct review procedures.

A. Centralized Review Procedures

The majority of states appear to have a centralized form of program review, with state agencies having some type of review process in place for institutions. Because there was such variation in procedures among the states, a synopsis of the practices used by these states is provided.

Alabama

A brief report is submitted by institutions regarding what needs to be done to improve the program. Level 1 review utilizes IPEDS data to determine viability of program. Non-viable programs are given a 3-year exemption and must explore ways to improve productivity, reporting on what was done and what changes were made.

Arizona

Utilizes 3 types of review processes. External reviews occur when the board requests that an external team be created to review the program. This process is not used very often, however, when it does occur consultants are selected from outside the system. The second type of process is the seven-year academic program review process. This process is used for all programs and also involves an external review team who evaluates the program and prepares a summary report for the board. System wide review is the final type that may be used by the state and is conducted every 5 years. In this process programs are reviewed against established criteria, including uniqueness, prestige, and amount of research generated, and recommendations are made for continuation, improvement, or discontinuation.

Arkansas

Program review is legislated and is done every 7-10 years. The board maintains a calendar of programs and institutions are required to submit written documentation of program activity. A team of external consultants (out- of-state) reviews the document and helps determine if standards are being met. If not, the

team visits the institution to collect additional information before making a recommendation.

Florida

System-wide review coordinated by board office. Select various disciplines each year and use external consultants. From this group a lead consultant is chosen who visits all institutions. A final report is prepared by the group and submitted to the Chancellor for a decision.

Illinois

Two- and four-year institutions are on a cyclical rotation of discipline based review. Private colleges are not so systematic and reviews are conducted as probiems arise. Institutions conduct research on outside issues in discipline and submit a paper on their findings.

Louisiana

Three types of review can be done. The first is an on-going process, done year to year, in which the board decides which area to review. Re-evaluation is the second type of review process that may be used by the state and involves a re-evaluation of previously approved programs. The third type of review is a specialized process in which the board decides to review a duplicated program and compares them to other state programs to see how it measures up.

Mississippi

The system used in this state appears to be more of a flagging process than a quality review. The board will select a program and examine its enrollment and graduate rate and compare this information to an established minimum productivity number. If an institution falls below this minimum for 2 years they are flagged and must justify the continued existence of the program and a recommendation is made.

Montana

Selected schools are reviewed based on productivity and graduation rates. Those that fall below the threshold are referred back to the campus for justification. Based on this information a decision is made about continuation.

New Hampshire

System selects an evaluation team, largely composed of president's of existing institutions, to conduct an on-site visit and make recommendations for changes,

continuation, or discontinuation. This is a cyclical process done on an average of 5 years. In many instances the team will consider the report of the accrediting agency when making decisions about existing programs.

New York

Conducted every 10 years unless triggered by high default rates, a drop in enrollment, or complaints.

North Carolina

Reviews are done by discipline biannually. The review includes productivity, program quality and assessment measures. External consultants conduct the reviews.

North Dakota

Review done by the state agency one year after the first graduating class to determine continued need for program. Recommendations are made to the Academic Affairs Council.

Oregon

Conducts 5-year follow-up review of new programs.

South Carolina

Cyclical by discipline (or cluster of similar disciplines) and uses a team of external reviewers from outside of the state. The review is very similar to an accreditation model and is sometimes tied to other initiatives such as specialized accreditation or recently mandated institutional effectiveness reviews.

South Dakota

Each campus is on a 5-year cycle (minimum). Special program accreditations have campus review coordinated with accreditation review. Each campus has different requirements. A report goes to the Academic Affairs Council, the Presidents Council, and then to the Board of Regents. Institutions may make recommendations for action from the Board of Regents, but the board will also issue policy directives.

Tennessee

Program review is done in conjunction with performance funding. Two-year programs are reviewed each year for 3 years. Previously approved and all other

programs. The major criteria used include accreditation, test scores, on general education exams, alumni/student surveys, retention, persistence, placement of graduates, and consistency with the strategic plan.

Texas

External consultants (outside of the state) conduct the reviews that are stimulated by the interests of the General Assembly. Process is similar to accreditation.

West Virginia

Reviews are conducted on a 5-year cycle. Programs are divided among disciplines and institutions are required to conduct a self-study format and submit a report to a statewide review committee. This committee consists of faculty from across the state, nominated by their university president and approved by the Chancellors.

B. Decentralized Process

A number of state agencies rely on a more decentralized review process and leave the responsibility for program review with the institution. Institutions are required to have review procedures in place but are given the autonomy to establish their own process and criteria. The time frame for review can vary from 2 - 10 years and a report of program review findings must be submitted to the state agency. States utilizing this form of program review include Colorado, Hawaii, Kansas, Michigan, Oklahoma, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin.

C. Limited or No Review Procedures

Many states have the authority to require program review and establish criteria, however, due to limited staff and financial resources do not have sound or consistent practices in place. These states include: Alaska, Connecticut, Idaho, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Wyoming.

D. No authority over program approval process

Some state agencies have little or no authority over the program review procedures for higher education institutions and appear to serve in more of a planning or coordinating role. These agencies are not directly involved in program approval, but leave the responsibility for this task in the hands of the institutions themselves. States falling within this category include Minnesota and Delaware.

Appendix D

A Summary of Program Approval and Review Practices in Selected Foreign Countries and Regions

Eight foreign countries and regions are selected in this study. They are Australia, Canada, Germany (Lower Saxony), Hong Kong, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, and the United Kingdom.

Australia

In Australia, the federal government plays a directive and intrusive role. The federal process has been unstable but so far, there is no any uniform program evaluation methodologies in place in Australia. The federal Government has previously implemented various quality assurance schemes but these have operated at the university level and not for particular programs.

The Commonwealth asks the university to submit quality assurance and improvement plans that must be linked to the strategic plans of the university. Plans are required to be presented on the basis of self-assessment against a small number of "appropriate and robust indicators" and in a form suitable for publication. The indicators are determined by individual institutions. The format of the plan is as follows:

- Mission statement/objectives in relation to quality
- Quality improvement and assurance strategies and performance measures

At minimum, the Commonwealth requires the plan to describe the following:

- The graduate attributes expected by the institution and indicators of employer satisfaction
- The outcomes of the course experienced questionnaire, specifically, the proportion of graduate who agree, or strongly agree in respect of good teaching, generic skills and overall satisfaction (based on a national survey).
- Positive outcomes of graduates, as shown in the Graduate Destination Survey, expressed as the proportion in full-time students and the proportion of those available for full-time employment, actually in full-time employment.

Apart from the above, each institution has its own accreditation process generally requiring that particular programs are re-accredited every five years.

Canada

No national educational policies are in place. Decentralized to the provinces. Some provinces use performance indicators at the institutional level.

Each university by virtue of its charter is a legitimate degree-granting institution and there is no need to apply review and accrediting processes within the system. The pressures for program review/accreditation/performance measurement don't exist in Canada.

Germany (Lower Saxony)

The government of Lower Saxony delegated the responsibility for quality assurance to the central quality assurance agency that is responsible for the assessment management and co-ordination and for the support of universities. Institutions for higher education all over Lower Saxony are assessed systematically and in determined assessment cycles about every five or six years. The special feature of the Lower Saxony system is the extensiveness of assessment, which includes quality assessment of academic communities all over Lower Saxony. It also includes the quality assessment of research and the training of junior academic staff.

The planned procedure is a two-staged quality assessment with a follow-up. The first stage is an internal quality assessment that is carried out by the departments in the form of self-evaluation. The second stage is an external quality assessment, a process of external peer reviews that result in recommendations for quality improvement to the assessed department. As a follow-up the institutions are asked to develop a program according to the recommendations of peer reviews, that explains practical solutions how to solve problems that were found and how to maintain high standards in fields whose assessment showed good results. The assessment results may be published. The publication of a summarizing so-called final report is eventually triggered by the quality agency in close co-operation with the peers.

Hong Kong:

Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) is the quality assurance agency in Hong Kong system (only polytechnic institutions are accredited by HKCAA, traditional universities are self-accrediting).

- Program Validation (program approval):

Program validation is a process carried out within the tertiary institutions themselves (internal) and by the HKCAA (external) whereby a proposed program is examined against criteria related to academic standards and to the aims of the program. The external validation process is conducted by the HKCAA consulting appropriately qualified professionals (from Hong Kong and overseas) usually including one from the institution itself, and local lay people. A panel will convene and on-site review may be conducted. The panel may meet the

program team, students and senior staff of the institution and such other people as are deemed appropriate. The principal issues considered by HKCAA validation panels are as follows:

Academic staff

- program structure
- learning and assessment
- facilities and support
- quality assurance
- staff development

The program validation panel will prepare a report recommend for action: approval, conditional approval and disapproval.

❑ Revalidation (program review)

A revalidation exercise, again using an external panel, normally takes place within six years of the date of the original validation. The institutional program team's appraisal report on its perception of the operation and development of the program, and its strengths and weaknesses, forms the central theme in a revalidation exercises. The institution will recommend changes or improvements to the program based on its experience and evaluation, and its perception of changing community needs. These are documented for the HKCAA. The HKCAA will recommend the action by approving conditionally approving, or disapproving the program.

Comment from the staff of HKCAA: Initial validation plus periodic revalidation is a process that would provide continued quality assurance for all academic programs. The cycle will ensure that the programs are being constantly updated and monitored.

<u>The Netherlands</u>:

The government delegates the authority for program approval and review to the Council of Dutch Universities, which is a body of university representatives appointed by the universities' presidents. Program review is conducted cyclically by reviewing all the programs for a five-year period. Each year about one fifth of the programs in the Dutch system are reviewed. The program review procedure stresses on the institutional self-study. External reviewers selected by the Council are from both Dutch and non-Dutch. The Council of the Dutch Universities will receive the reports from the university and the external review committee and the universities are rated according to the review results.

The government will audit the quality assurance process. Funds may be reduced or programs are even eliminated to those programs at the end of the ranking.

The Netherlands quality assurance system is a more autonomous system; it's also very research-oriented. The procedures are rather stable at this time. Its weakness is the difficulty for the development of inter-disciplinary programs.

New Zealand

- University Section:

On behalf of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC), the Committee on University Academic Programs (CUAP) is responsible for conducting the program approval and review procedures of all the universities. It's under the monitor of the New Zealand University Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU), which will comment on the adequacy and effectiveness of the operation of CUAP.
The audit process:

The NZUAAU audit panel consults about 75 people by a mixture of correspondence, telephone interview and personal interview. The people consulted include current and former members of CUAP, university academics and administrators, education officers and other representatives of student associations, professional associations and representatives of the New Zealand Polytechnic Programs Committee (NZPPC) and New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). The panel inspects a wide range of documents, including samples of the proposed courses and programs and the trails produced in relation to these courses by the actions taken following the receipt of a proposal by CUAP. These actions include CUAP's own deliberations, the circulation of the proposal through the other universities, and the interaction between the universities at that stage. In respecting the trails, the panel is able to read the comments made on the proposed courses by a large number of academics and administrators, and to note the consequences of the comments.

- Non-University Section (Polytechnic University Section)

In cooperation with the Association of Polytechnics in New Zealand (APNZ) and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), the New Zealand Polytechnic Programs Committee (NZPPC) is the accreditation agency for New Zealand polytechnics.

NZPPC invites polytechnics to submit their quality management systems (QMS) of policies and procedures, with the mechanisms for evaluation. The QMS exercise has been a formative one where each institution's documentation

has been evaluated recognizing the freedom to choose its own form, style and individual expression of quality.

NZPPC Accreditation forms:

- Acceptance Vs. Interim Acceptance: NZPPC may award a polytechnic acceptance of its documented QMS, or an intermediary stage of interim acceptance may be awarded which recognizes that requirements have been substantially met and there is an agreed program for improvements on the basis of the evaluation panel's recommendations. The interim acceptance standard qualifies the polytechnic to apply for the automatic accreditation to deliver low level registered unit standards, if required, where the accreditation option is "evaluation of documentation by NZQA/NZPPC.

Accreditation Action Plan: National standards Bodies for specific industries may have specific requirements -- Accreditation Action Plans (AAP) which need to be addressed by the providers seeking accreditation. An AAP is not effective until registered formally by NZQA, and providers notified of its registration

- Unit-free accreditation: Unit-free accreditation is the accreditation for a Domain, Sub-field or Field on the National Qualification Framework (NQF) in which there are no unit standards yet registered at the level of application. An application for unit-free accreditation will be accepted by NZPPC only if some specific conditions are satisfied.

Scotland

In Scotland, there were three main forms of quality assurance activity for teaching and learning. The first was the internal quality assurance activity undertaken by the individual institutions. The second was the external quality audit, conducted by the Higher Education Council (HEQC), to ensure that institutions both had in place and implemented effectively, appropriate internal procedures. Third was the subject-by-subject quality assessments being undertaken by the SHEFC to assure itself that the internal procedures were producing the desired results.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom system university system has been moving rapidly from self-regulation towards more mixed and externally imposed systems. Basically, there are several forms of quality assurance:

❑ Quality audits: Quality audits in the Higher education in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) were carried out by the Division of Quality Audit of the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) from 1993 to 1997, when the HEQC was subsumed within a new Quality Assurance

Agency for Higher Education (QAAHE). The audit process consists of the provision of briefing material for an audit team, an audit visit and an audit report.

- Quality assessment: Quality assessment has been conducted by each of the funding councils in England (acting also for Northern Ireland), Scotland and Wales. Assessment is of particular subjects, rather than of whole institutions, as in the case of quality audits. Quality is measured not against any absolute standards, but rather against the aims and objectives set by institutions themselves. The process consists of a self-assessment, followed by peer review that includes a site visit, and a published report.

- Standards-Based Quality Assurance: The United Kingdom systems of external scrutiny of teaching and learning are currently changing significantly in order to combine and simplify the external quality assessment and quality audit procedures, and to address concern over the educational standards attained by graduates. The NCIHE (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education) advocated the establishment of a national framework of qualifications, recognizing, however, that the present distinctiveness of the Scottish system would prevent this from happening in the short term.

- Quality Assessment of Research: Research quality in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom has been evaluated through four, research assessment exercises (RAEs).

- Other Forms of Quality Assurance in the United Kingdom: External examiners and professional accreditation.

Appendix E

Memorandum on Policy Alternatives Submitted to Dr. Donna Brodd

MEMORANDUM

TO: Donna Brodd

FROM: Don G. Creamer
Steven M. Janosik

SUBJECT: Policy Recommendations

DATE: September 11, 1998

You requested our suggestions concerning policy alternatives open to SCHEV in the execution of its responsibilities for academic program approval and review.

Our comments are only partially grounded in our study about U.S. and foreign country and region customs. That study was designed to describe current practices. Your request goes beyond the study data and into hypothetically better policies; however, we are happy to share our views on the subject of alternatives to current practices.

An important context for these suggestions is the SCHEV Agency Strategic Plan in which a goal is stated to decentralize certain practices such as academic program approval and review in an environment of exacting accountability. Our suggestions speak to alternatives for accomplishing this strategic goal.

It should be remembered also that our study did not involve the views of institutional representatives. Based on our study, we do not know what academic officers and presidents of institutions think about current practice or about preferred policy alternatives.

A final caveat in our suggestions is that they contain certain value orientations toward higher education in Virginia. We believe, for example, that colleges and universities are fully capable of making their own decisions about

the initiation and continuation of academic programs that fit their mission parameters and their fiscal capabilities. We also believe that these decisions should be made by use of a collaborative method among institutions, but that they can be made better by the persons most directly responsible for academic quality and fiscal responsibility--the presidents and governing boards of the institutions themselves.

We see four alternative courses of actions for SCHEV and they are shown here in order of necessary change to current practice:

Alternative # 1: Do nothing.

Clearly, current practices are working, though they are labor intensive for the SCHEV staff and they conflict with stated agency goals. Program approval processes require a significant investment of staff resources but may not ensure program quality. Program reviews are not completed in a systematic manner and thus, do not serve as a legitimate check on quality of approved programs. Current practices may not encourage curricular innovation and they diminish power within institutions to take full advantage of faculty talents.

Alternative # 2: Adopt the Modified Institutional/State Collaboration Model proposed in our study of academic program approval and review practices.

Significant among the advantages of this approach is the continuation of a shared responsibility for program approval and review between SCHEV and the respective institutions. Another advantage lies in the marked reduction of labor requirements by SCHEV. Most program approvals would be handled by the institutions and program reviews (of some kind that is not specified in the model) would occur on a staggered schedule depending upon the fit of the program with the institutional mission and the availability of resources. This approach is not a departure from current policy, only in the application of the policy. This model speaks to new programs but does not address programs already approved, however.

Alternative # 3: Adopt the Quality Assurance Audit Model proposed in our study of academic program approval and review practices.

This alternative does require some modification to current policy since it moves the state agency into an oversight and envisioning role while empowering institutions to develop their own quality assurance practices concerning academic program approval and review. This is not a hands-off policy; rather, it is a policy of institutional empowerment within an environment of state agency oversight. The approach also utilizes known practices already in use by accrediting agencies; that is, the periodic audit of institutional practices--in this case the audit of institutional quality assurance policies and practices.

Alternative # 4: Relinquish state agency program approval and review practices.

This approach is a radical departure from current practice but does have precedent. For example, New Jersey adopted such a stance by its state agency and institutions a few years ago. Under current practice in New Jersey, the Presidents Council handles all academic program approval and this approach is highly favored by the presidents. Program review practices, however, are not so clear in the New Jersey plan. In this plan, accountability for institutional decisions would have to be assured by the state agency and this might be accomplished in a modified use of the Quality Assurance Audit Model.

We believe that either the Modified Institutional/State Collaboration Model or the Quality Assurance Audit Model represents a positive change in current practice and moves the Council towards its stated goal. Both models further empower institutions to make their own decisions about academic programs. Both represent improvements over current practice regarding decentralization. Both models will offer additional freedom to SCHEV staff and Council members to engage more completely in policy making than in the administration of procedures.

In a spirit of collaboration and trust, we believe that the agency and the institutional provosts could design a new system that would accomplish the goals of the agency and serve the interests of institutional leaders. Such a new plan could incorporate best practices from our study, from regional and specialized accrediting practices, and from emerging quality assurance practices (some of which are already evident in foreign countries and regions). The new plan--the Virginia Plan--could incorporate use of educational technologies to facilitate collaborative decision making by institutions. A new arrangement for collaboration between public and independent colleges could and we believe should be forged.

Naturally, we support the development of a plan absolutely committed to quality and to other public policy concerns such as access, responsiveness, and prudent use of public resources. We believe that the current system lacks a proper balance between the authority of state agency personnel and institutional leaders. We further believe that a new arrangement or plan can be constructed that will better serve the interests of both parties and will result in improved educational services to the people of the Commonwealth.

Crucial to such a new plan is the collaborative construction of the details of executing responsibility for academic program approval and review in Virginia. We urge an unfettered opportunity in the creation of a new plan, free from past policy encumbrances, except for those of the Code of Virginia and full recognition of opportunities inherent in virtual learning environments and the

compelling needs of society for new educational ventures such as workforce training and the appropriate integration of technology in student and lifelong learning.

We believe that a new balance between accountability and trust can be found through the recommended collaborative action. The primary results of this restructured policy environment will be more responsive institutions offering higher quality education.